

Seven Biblical and Practical Steps to a Better You

by Dr. Steven Riser

Introduction: All of us are susceptible to internal conflicts and negative emotions. At any point in time, either you or someone close to you is in considerable need of emotional healing. We may be experiencing anxiety, despair, loneliness, nervousness, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, anger, fear or grief. Regardless of our current emotional state, we need to grow, mature and develop into the kind of person God intends for us to be. The following seven tried and true biblical principles are keys to our emotional and spiritual health. As you apply these principles to your life, by the grace of God, you will become a better you.

The first principle is we must...

1. Believe with all our hearts that God loves us—*Romans 5:8*

The most important step is to believe with all our hearts that God unconditionally loves us. Why is it so difficult for so many to believe this profound and important truth? To be sure, there are many reasons; but could it be that many people don't believe that God loves them because their guilty consciences can't accept the idea? Can a sinner believe that God really loves him or her? Yes! Why? Because: "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Is there anything that can convince us of God's love? Yes! The good news of the Gospel—that Christ died on the cross for our sins and was raised on the third day. If the cross of Christ cannot convince us of God's love, what else will (1 John 4:10)?

This truth is the most basic truth in healing. It must not only be understood, but it also must be experienced and it must grip our souls to the point that we have a natural desire to share the truth of God's love with others (Col. 1:28, 29). We would all do well to ask ourselves, "What practical difference does it make in my daily life that God loves me?"

Because He loves me:

- He is slow to lose patience with me.
- He takes the circumstances of my life and uses them in a constructive way—for my growth. He does not treat me as an object to be possessed but a person to be cherished.
- He does not need to build Himself up by putting me down.
- He does not keep score of all my sins or beat me over the head whenever He gets a chance. He is grieved when I live in a way that displeases Him because He sees it as an evidence of my lack of trust in and love for Him.

If you would be a better you, you must believe with all your heart that God unconditionally loves you! Next we must...

2. Humbly admit our problems and shortcomings—*1 John 1:8-9*

Step two tells us what we must do in order to experience God's love: we must recognize reality by humbly admitting our shortcomings, sins and problems. This involves, in part, living in light of God's truth. When we walk in the light of God's truth, we are able to see the

garbage in our lives and deal with it promptly and appropriately. We need to honestly confess and repent of our sins as God reveals them.

Why is it that so many people walk in darkness? Jesus said that men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil and they do not come to the light for fear their deeds would be exposed (John 3:18). Those who prefer darkness to light suffer needlessly because they deny they have any problems.

The only alternative is to wear masks, play games and to suffer emotionally. It's difficult to admit the truth unless you are willing to obey the truth. If we are going to be healed, we must first acknowledge that we have a sickness from which need to be healed. It is painful to expose ourselves to the light. We have a built-in resistance to recognizing in ourselves the self-centeredness which is so apparent to others who observe us. What we are saying here is that we earn the right to be miserable.

As Christians, if we are attacked by emotional or spiritual problems, we need to run to the light—to the truth of God's Word. We need to read and heed these words from the Apostle John, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:8-9). Thirdly we need to...

3. Take personal responsibility for our actions and attitudes—Romans 14:12

The third step is taking personal responsibility for our thoughts, words, attitudes and actions. The motto for the "National Association for Professional Bureaucrats" is: "When in charge, ponder; when in trouble, delete; when in doubt, mumble." The Apostle Paul had a different philosophy of life because he knew that, *"each of us will give an account of himself to God"* (Rom. 14:12). He knew that some day he must answer to God and give account for his life and ministry (2 Cor. 5:10).

From the very beginning our first parents—Adam and Eve—had a problem with accepting personal responsibility. Adam blamed his wife and Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:12-13). We would naturally rather rationalize our sin or blame others than to accept personal responsibility. We have become "professional excuse makers" with an uncanny knack at justifying or excusing our behavior. I used to say to my children, "You must think that I am dumb if you expect me to believe that." Do we think that God is dumb or don't we care what He thinks?

Isn't it easy to find ways of avoiding responsibility? But clever as we may be at covering up and rationalizing our misdeeds, the consequences are merely postponed, never evaded (Gal. 6:7-10). No amount of covering up can free us from the consequences of our actions. Since we reap whatever we sow, it's no wonder that the biblical writers never cease calling us to repentance. The past—your past and mine—must be resolved before we can live gracefully in the present or look hopefully to the future. *"For he who covers his sins shall not prosper but whoever forsakes his sins shall obtain mercy"* (Prov. 28:13). Fourthly, we must

4. Believe that change is possible through the power of Christ—Philippians 4:13

The fourth step to a better you is to believe that, with God's help, change is possible. We do have a better alternative and Christ can make a decisive difference in our lives. Unfortunately, some people prefer the evil that is known to the positive change that is unknown. It has been said that "some people are so fearful of change that had they been present at creation they would have voted for chaos."

For the Christian, a cynical, fatalistic view of the world constitutes a practical denial of faith. Christ living in us gives us a new attitude, a new motivation, a new capacity to love, a new power to obey and new values to uphold. Either change is possible or the blood of Christ has lost its power. Some forfeit the possibility of positive change by saying, “Well, I can’t help it, that’s just the way I am.” Have you ever said that before? The truth is: that may be the way we are but, by God’s grace, that is not the way we need to continue to be. If you don’t believe that the Lord can change you, I don’t believe He will, because Jesus said, “*According to your faith be it unto you*” (Matt. 9:29). Whatever our problems, Christ can and will make a difference as we accept His love, acknowledge our sin and avail ourselves of the divine resources that He has given (2 Pet.1: 3). Paul put it this way, “*I can do everything through him who gives me strength*” (Phil. 4:13). Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Next, we must...

5. Pray honestly and specifically about heart-felt needs and concerns—*John 16:24*

The fifth step to a better you is honest prayer. We need to share our whole lives with God and relate everything to God. Prayer, among other things, is an exercise in honesty and God says in His Word that He desires “utter truthfulness.” If we can’t be honest with God, with whom can we be honest? He knows the truth anyway; we might as well admit it. In prayer, we don’t try to manipulate God to do our will—we endeavor to discover, delight in, and do His will. Honest prayer is not, nor should it be, a substitute for personal obedience. Those who use it as a substitute are using it as a crutch. God intends prayer to be a lifeline, not a crutch. Jesus said, “*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete*” (John 16:24). Just as earthly fathers love to give good gifts to their children, so God, our heavenly Father, loves to give good gifts to His children. The sixth step to a better you is to...

6. Ask and offer forgiveness to others whenever necessary—*Ephesians 4:32; Acts 24:16*

The sixth step to a better you is: to ask forgiveness of those you offended and offer forgiveness to those who offended you. God tells us in His Word to, “*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* (Eph. 4:32). It’s not enough to confess our sins to God, we must ask forgiveness and if necessary make restitution to the offended parties (Acts 24: 16). The circle of confession should be the same size as the circle of sin. Who are we kidding if we ask the Lord to change us and are unwilling to ask others for forgiveness? Who are we kidding if we ask the Lord to forgive us but are unwilling to forgive others? What poison is to the body, bitterness is to the soul and if we fail to forgive, we poison our own souls. As long as we harbor an unforgiving spirit, we cannot expect to be healed—spiritually, emotionally or relationally.

If healing is to take place, we must forgive as well as ask forgiveness. We must offer forgiveness as soon as we are offended—that means before it is even requested. Some of the most miserable people in the world are avid injustice collectors who go about seeing how often they can get their feelings hurt. They habitually violate the principles of love in 1 Corinthians 13 which says that loves does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. Love not only forgives, it doesn’t keep score and it gives up the right to get even. Those who refuse to forgive hurt themselves far worse than anyone else. Finally, we must...

7. Develop mental discipline and cultivate a Christian worldview—2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Corinthians 10:5

The final step to a better you is to learn to discipline your mind and develop a Christian worldview. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul says that God has given us a sound mind, that is, he has given us the spiritual fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:23), therefore we need to exercise mental discipline and take responsibility for the thoughts we think (Phil. 4:8). Additionally, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*” Whether we realize it or not, many of us are mentally lazy, some of us may even be mentally constipated and we desperately need to do something about it.

The cultivation of positive mental attitudes towards, God, others and ourselves requires mental discipline. As long as we persist in being dominated by the negative emotions of our lower nature, we will never amount to anything for God. Life is a battle, an active warfare against destructive influences and the admonition to actively reject evil runs throughout Scripture. The battle against sin is fought and won or lost in our minds. We need to learn to think God’s thoughts after Him if we are going to be guided by His wisdom. This is not easy or automatic and requires that we learn to perceive reality from God’s point of view by developing a Christian or Biblical worldview. Only then will we be able to properly evaluate and expose the unbiblical thinking so prevalent in our secular society.

Conclusion: In conclusion, consider the following:

1. Important **question:** Is the character and conduct of Christ being reflected in my life?
2. Important **challenge:** To make progress in the process of becoming more like Christ. You can become a better you as you understand and apply God’s wise and loving principles.
 1. Believe with all your heart that God unconditionally loves you.
 2. Humbly admit your shortcomings and failures.
 3. Take personal responsibility for your thoughts, words, actions and attitudes.
 4. Believe that change is possible through the power of Christ.
 5. Pray honestly and specifically about heart-felt needs and concerns.
 6. Ask and offer forgiveness to others whenever necessary.
 7. Develop mental discipline and cultivate a Christian worldview.

God said, “Build me a better world,” and I said, “How?
The world is such a cold place and so complicated now!
And I’m so tired and useless, there’s nothing I can do.”
But God in His wisdom said, “Just build a better you!”
—Credit to Christian Psychiatrist Dr. James Mallory, *The Kink and I* (out of print).